

THE CENTER OF THE NATIONS

Over the years Linda and I have lived in two countries, the United States and Canada, and five states. Our Winnipeg ministry was my first pastorate, and I wish all pastors had the same privilege as I due to the way we were embraced by our dear Canadian friends.

Following the ministry in Winnipeg, Manitoba, we moved to Fresno, CA. I had two dreams for a Fresno house: (1) at least one palm tree, and (2) a swimming pool. Our first Fresno house had neither when we took up residence, so we soon moved to a house that had a large palm tree in the front, a swimming pool in the back, along with two grape arbors, a plum tree, peach tree, and boysenberries. I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

We often reflect on those beautiful Fresno years which have provided friends to this day. We always wanted to live in a friendly neighborhood surrounded by loving people because that was the type of community which I enjoyed during my childhood days.

But imagine never having that privilege of choosing where you were going to live from your birth to your death. And to make matters worse, when you finally arrived at that place, you discover that you live among people who hate you, don't want you there, and will do what they can to remove you from that land. Such was the nation of Israel.



Figure 1 - Yohn's swimming party - Photo by Rick Yohn

Did you realize that the Land of the Bible was never Israel's choice? That decision was God's alone. In fact, God told His people through the Prophet Ezekiel that He was going to place them at the most strategic location on earth – **“the center of the nations”**. *The Prophet tells us, “This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.”* (Ezekiel 5:5)

You may be wondering in what way Israel is in the **center of the nations**. That was my response when I first read the Ezekiel passage. But then I checked The Schlegel Satellite Bible Atlas Map and understood what God was saying with that statement.



Figure 2 - William Schlegel - The Satellite Bible Atlas - Introduction

God planted Israel in the **center of the nations** so that those who wanted to go from Asia to Africa had to pass through the Land of the Bible. Those who traveled from Africa to Europe also had to go through the Land. And not only was Israel located in the **center of the nations**, but the people around her were also distant relatives that did not want Israel in the Land.

Why would God place Israel in the **center of the nations**? Because God loved the world so much, He wanted every human being to know Him in a personal and intimate way. Israel was God's "Light to the nations". That was God's purpose for choosing Israel. The Prophet Isaiah affirmed this truth when he wrote, *“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may*

bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6). And though Israel has failed on many occasions to carry out their calling, God has never given up on them.

In fact, knowing that Israel would fail in their responsibility, God continued to show His love to the world by sending His One and only Son as both Savior and as “the genuine Light of the world”. And when our Lord paid the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God the Father.

Consider one other fact to note about this nation. God not only placed Jerusalem in the "center of the nations," but He also determined to place His name in that City. Now this concept may be a little puzzling, but allow me to share with you a little bit of the Hebrew language. God reveals Himself in Scripture by many different names. One of those names is **El Shaddai**, meaning the "All-Sufficient God," or "God Almighty." God informed Moses, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as **God Almighty**, but by my name the LORD, I did not make myself known to them" (Exodus 6:2). The Hebrew word Shaddai means "**Almighty**." The first letter of Shaddai is the Hebrew "Shin". You can find it by turning to Psalm 119, which is an acrostic Psalm, meaning that each Hebrew letter from the twenty-two letter-alphabet is followed by eight verses. And when you turn to Psalm

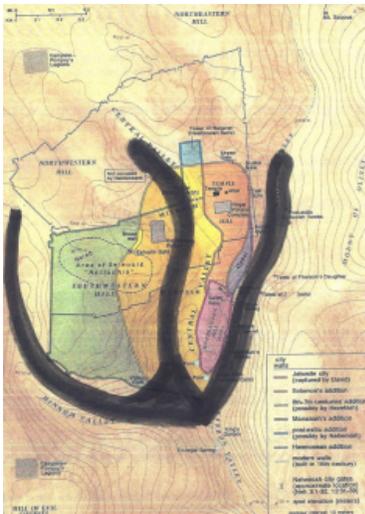


Figure 3 - The letter "Shin" fits the three valleys of Jerusalem - <http://www.freewebs.com/kcdi/IsraelToday5.htm>

119:161 you will see the letter "Shin" above that Hebrew word for promise of God  verse. It is also the first letter in the "Name" (Shem). Consider this concerning Jerusalem – **“But now I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there, and I have chosen David to rule my people Israel.”** (2 Chronicles 6:6).

When we look at the natural topography of Jerusalem, this is what we discover. It is shaped very much like the letter "Shin". And that is the first letter of "**SHADDAI**" (Mighty One) and the first letter of the word for "**SHEM**" (Name). It is also the first letter of the word "**SHALOM**" (Peace).

Jerusalem’s earlier name was "**Salem**" (Peace), so Jerusalem is "the City of Peace" (**Jeru-Salem**). And it is surrounded by three valleys: (1) the **Kidron** on the east side of the City, (2) the **Tyropean** or Valley of the Cheese Makers in the center, and (3) the **Hinnom** Valley on the west side of the City. God’s name is

not only in Jerusalem in a spiritual sense, but also in a very literal sense.

So, with Israel failing in their responsibility to be a light to the nations, and Jesus now in heaven, **God raised up another people to carry the torch of spiritual light to the nations.** However, in this group, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, male or female. Instead, we are one in Christ. As Peter was an apostle to the Jews, so Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8).

Today Israel is surrounded by hostile nations that want to see them driven into the Sea. And the Bible has predicted four significant invasions against the people of Israel. The **first** occurred in 722 B.C. by King Sennacherib of Assyria. He deported the Jews of the Northern Kingdom to Mesopotamia. For the **second** great invasion of the land, God raised up King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who invaded the land on three separate occasions. In 605 B.C. he removed a group of Jews from Israel and deported them to Babylon, in present-day Iraq. King Nebuchadnezzar deported the Prophet Daniel at that time. Then in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar deported another

group of Jews, including the Prophet Ezekiel. And finally, in 586 B. C., he destroyed the City of Jerusalem along with its Temple.

The **third** prophecy about an invasion of the land came from Jesus as He sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. When one of the disciples bragged about the beauty of the City and especially the Temple, Jesus replied with this prophetic warning: "*Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down'*" (Matthew 24:1-2). Within forty years, the 10th Roman Legion rode into Jerusalem and destroyed the City and the Temple in A.D. 70, the very same day of the year when Babylon had destroyed both City and Temple in 586 B.C.

However, there is a **fourth** prophecy concerning a future invasion of the City of Jerusalem that has both a "near and far" view. In other words, Jesus' prediction about the City applies to both the 1st Century and future time, possibly in our lifetime. Jesus prophesied, "*When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near . . . They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations, Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Luke 21:20,24).

Since 586 B.C. Jerusalem and Israel as a nation have been under Gentile control until 1947. The nations that dominated Israel included Babylon (586 B.C.), Media-Persia (538 B.C.), Greece (332 B.C.), Maccabees (142 B.C.), Rome, (63 B.C.), Byzantine Era (A.D. 313), Arab Rule (638), Turks (1071), Crusaders (1099), Mamelukes (1291), Ottoman Empire (1517-1917), British Rule (1917-1947), Israel (1947 – Present). Today Israel is once again a nation with its own government. Some scholars see this as the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that the "Times of the Gentiles" have been completed, while others believe that such a period is still future, waiting for the 2nd Coming of Christ.



Figure 4 - Jesus Return - godsheart-heart2heart.blogspot.com

Whatever viewpoint you may have on the subject, God continues to have a future for Israel. Not only has He promised a problematic future for His people, but He has also pledged a glorious future for them. The Apostle John prophesied, "*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns . . . He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean*" (Revelation 19:11-12b). At that time, we can expect the 2nd Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will touch

down on the Mount of Olives and fulfill the prophecies of the Prophet Zachariah and the Prophet Ezekiel.

"I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zechariah 14:2-4)

"I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them, and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms." (Ezekiel 37:21-22). "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people." (Ezekiel 37:26).

Yes, God placed Israel physically at the "center of the nations" when He birthed them under Joshua, during a seven-year period of first taking the central part of the land, and then the southern portion, and eventually the northern area for control of Canaan. Today Israel remains at the "center of the nations" physically, politically, and most importantly, prophetically. In fact, it has been said over the years that the best evidence of the inspiration of Scripture is the existence of the Jewish people living in the Land of the Bible.